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MALTA
A DECADE OF
EU MEMBERSHIP
2004 - 2014
INSTITUTE FOR
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Occasional Paper 05/2015

REFLECTIONS ON A DECADE OF EU MEMBERSHIP

EXPECTATIONS • ACHIEVEMENTS • DISAPPOINTMENTS • THE FUTURE

The Europeanisation of Maltese Interest Groups: A Comparative Study After the First Decade of EU Membership

by Mario Thomas Vassallo



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Publisher: **Institute for European Studies**, Msida, Malta.

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Citation

Mario Thomas Vassallo (2015). 'The Europeanisation of Maltese Interest Groups: a Comparative Study After the First Decade of EU Membership.' *Reflections of a Decade of EU Membership: Expectations, Achievements, Disappointments and the Future Occasional Papers*, No. 5, Institute for European Studies (Malta).

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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
IEG	Irish Environmental Group
ISHG	Irish Social and Human rights Group
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender
MEG	Maltese Environmental Group
MEUSAC	Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee
MSHG	Maltese Social and Human rights Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SHEGs	Social, Human rights, and Environmental Groups



The Europeanisation of Maltese interest groups: a comparative study after the first decade of EU membership

by Mario Thomas Vassallo


Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a study on the Europeanisation of interest groups in Malta during its first ten years of EU membership. The nature of this empirical study is primarily comparative, covering the Republic of Ireland (hereafter referred to as Ireland) as well. Ireland is another small island member state on the periphery of an integrated continent and which bears some cultural similarities and historical experiences with Malta. Although Ireland may exhibit absolute dimensions of bigger proportions when compared to micro Malta, if the notion of relative power¹ is applied in conjunction with historical pathways and geographical approximation to neighbour countries, Ireland is definitely small compared to Great Britain. Hence the selection of Malta and Ireland as two small island member states of the EU avoids any controversy of a definitional nature.

In particular this study sets to explore how the embedded geopolitical characteristics originating from small-sized member states affect the resistance to (or incorporation of) the external incentives and norms of EU governance. Research primacy rests on the role and character of interest groups involved in national and sub-national policy-making and their interplay with governmental actors, as well as their participation in EU affairs. The study has two principal aims:

1. Assessing whether Maltese and Irish interest groups have experienced a marginal or significant degree of Europeanisation within their organisational set-ups, working practices and values, and

¹ The relative, or qualitative, approach considers power to be more fungible. Size still plays a role in defining a small state, but in this approach it is merely a variable, and furthermore is relative (Nugent 2003). Jonathan Swift's reflection, quoted from his epic novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), that '[u]ndoubtedly philosophers are in the right when they tell us that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison' really hits the nail on its head. The relative approach evaluates the state's relationship to its wider-environment with possible considerations, including the amount of influence a state exercises and the extent to which it perceives itself, and is perceived by others, as being small.

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2. Identifying whether the resulting Europeanisation is a consequence of vertical or horizontal enablers of change.

The investigation starts by introducing interest groups and the greater role that they are incrementally acquiring in the public sphere. This is followed by a brief analysis of Europeanisation, emphasising its potential to affect changes in domestic interest groups through its vertical and horizontal stimuli for change. Prior to the presentation of the empirical findings, a detailed explanation of the research methodology employed is provided. The conclusion summarises the quantitative and qualitative findings and provides an answer to the two principal aims.

Research context

Simply defined, interest groups comprise a wide and diversified range of rational entities, united by a common belief system, that have sufficient identity to act on behalf of their members and which, therefore, have some influence either on public opinion or on government to attain their prescribed goals.² They include a pluralist range of non-governmental entities operating across different sectoral areas at the local, national and supranational levels of power. Lately, the meaning of the term *interest groups* has been widened to include universities, local government committees, state-sponsored bodies, public/private partnerships, the media, as well as foreign and pan-continental interest groups that are all exerting a direct or indirect impact on domestic institutions and processes that enact public policy.³

As interest groups provide a link between state actors and the rest of society,⁴ their meaningful input into the decision-making process is seen as a sign of a functioning democracy,⁵ particularly in our times which are characterised by erosional symptoms of public trust in traditional politics, made evident by popular uprisings, low electoral turnouts, declining party memberships and dwindling interest in traditional political affairs. Like other European politicians, Maltese and Irish political elites are aware of the escalating importance of interest groups in managing public affairs within an EU context. Edward Warrington claims that civil society in Malta offers one of the most interesting and diverse forms of citizens' engagement, deeply rooted in Catholicism and in representative democracy;⁶ yet Alfred Sant laments that it 'is still considered as a vague field of analysis, lacking


² R. Scruton (2007), *Dictionary of Political Thought*, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

³ A.J. Cigler and B.A. Loomis, B.A. (1995), *Interest Group Politics*, USA: CQ Press.

⁴ I. Bache and S. George (2006), *Politics in the European Union*, UK: Oxford University Press.

⁵ K. Karr (2006), *Democracy and Lobbying in the European Union*, Chicago: University of Chicago.

⁶ E. Warrington (2010), *The Department of Public Policy*, Malta: University of Malta, p. 5.



adequate national awareness and consistent momentum of leadership’.⁷ In Ireland, civic activism takes place via a wide range of organisations,⁸ practically covering all areas of social, cultural and economic life. However, there is limited information in the literature with regards to the impact of EU policies and its governance style on Irish interest groups.⁹

The next section reviews the different dimensions of Europeanisation and proposes a definition that is specifically related to its transformative potential impact on domestic interest groups.

Understanding the dimensions of Europeanisation

The most common trends in the literature of Europeanisation focus on the impact of European unification on domestic political and cultural processes of the member states and beyond.¹⁰ Notwithstanding the emphasis on ‘bottom-up’ initiatives on policy processes, the conceptual scope of Europeanisation started to incorporate ‘top-down’ and ‘horizontal’ initiatives in favour of the European regional integration, together with an accentuation on national and sub-national structures and actors.¹¹ Europeanisation, in its contemporary meaning, involves a 360 degree approach to interpret the institutionalisation of EU polity, politics and policies across supranational, national and sub-national arenas. This implies the co-existence of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ mechanisms of Europeanisation that render the EU as a political system with interconnected institutions, operating at multiple levels and having unique policy features.¹²

The ‘vertical’ dimension of Europeanisation refers to hierarchical linkages and negotiations between higher and lower levels of governance, including their institutional, financial, and legislative aspects. Here, local capacity building and incentives for effectiveness of sub-national levels of government and civil society are crucial issues for improving the quality and coherence of public policy.

The ‘horizontal’ dimension refers to cooperative arrangements between regions or between state and non-state organisations. These partnership agreements are increasingly common as a means by

⁷ A. Sant (2009), ‘Religjon Organizzata u Awtorità Ċivili’, in Farrugia, M., *Hide and Seek: reflections on faith and culture*, Malta: KSU, p. 128.


⁸ M. Adshead and J. Tonge (2009), *Politics in Ireland: convergence and divergence*, Ireland: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ *Study on Volunteering on the EU: Country Report Ireland (2010)*, at http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Voluntary/Policy/National_report_IE.pdf

¹⁰ T. Börzel T. and Risse (2003), ‘Conceptualizing the Domestic Impact of Europe’, in K. Featherstone and C.M. Radaelli (eds.) *The Politics of Europeanization*, Oxford: Oxford Press, p. 57.

¹¹ M.P. Vink and P. Graziano (eds.) (2008) *Europeanization: New Research Agendas*, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹² I. Bache and M. Flinders (2004), *Multi-level Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.



which to improve the effectiveness of public service delivery and implementation of development strategies through socialisation and collective learning.¹³

In this context, Europeanisation is defined as ‘the reorientation or reshaping of politics’ in the national and subnational arena in ways that reflect policies, practices or preference advanced through the EU system of governance.¹⁴ In line with its specific aims, this study opts for a more stringent definition:

Europeanisation refers to the effects of vertical and horizontal enablers of change on the domestic patterns of interest representation and routes of influence as a corollary of EU membership.

Assessing Europeanisation effects on interest groups

The principal effects of Europeanisation on interest groups include how accession may have increased the resource base of domestic groups and changed their internal organisational structures, enhanced their participation in domestic affairs, created new institutional channels for lobbying and diversified their normative formation to start embracing a more European identity. Rinus Van Schendelen maintains that ‘managing the EU arena’ and ‘handling the home front’ are not contrary forces but constitute a single continuum.¹⁵ The empirical results being presented in this study relate specifically to four different, yet inter-related variables concerning (i) attitude, (ii) responsiveness, (iii) involvement and (iv) normativeness of interest groups vis-à-vis the EU. The next sections map out the various factors that have been incorporated in designing an appropriate research methodology to investigate how Maltese and Irish interest groups respond to the mentioned variables.


Spatial and temporal dimensions

This study is approached from the perspective and empirical experience of two small island member states, namely Malta and Ireland. They share a common set of features in their geopolitical and geocultural profiles, although nonetheless significant diverging attributes cannot be ignored. Their common British legacy after centuries of colonisation nurtured similar political ideologies and practice at home. Their political systems are based on the English Westminster model, though less so today than in the past. From an economic perspective, the Maltese and Irish economies have undergone great transformations in the past three decades and, prior to the recent collapse of the

¹³ S. Bulmer and C. Radaelli (2004), ‘The Europeanisation of National Policy’ in S. Bulmer and C. Lequesne (eds.), *Member States and the European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ I. Bache and A. Jordan (2006), *The Europeanization of British Politics*, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁵ R. Van Schendelen (2005), *Macchiavelli in Brussels: The Art of Lobbying the EU*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.



Irish economy, they were favourably appraised by the international community for their knowledge-open-economies focusing on services and high-tech industries. Culturally, the two states have traditionally shared a Roman Catholic outlook towards life, although their conservative societal fabric started to change since the 1960s due to strong processes of secularisation and consumerism.

Besides the implications of smallness, Malta and Ireland have also to be comprehensively studied as peripheral island states on the borders of a massive integrated continent. 'Islandness' lends itself to metaphorical definition transcending the strictly geographical requirement of water boundaries.

Anthropology and sociology draw attention to 'islandness' that is also a state of mind, or a human condition of relative isolation and distinctiveness, expressed across almost the entire range of human experience, from economic activity to speech patterns, from belief systems to genetics'.¹⁶

In this context, this paper is interested in how the elements of size and geography shape the ecology of the polity's landscape and the ethos of interdependencies among governmental and non-governmental actors. Godfrey Baldacchino argues that 'any island, any islander', is a living contradiction between 'openness and closure', gripped by negotiating the anxious balance between 'roots and routes' and, thus, is not surprisingly nervous of 'bridges and tunnels' that presage attachment to main-lands.¹⁷ In this vein of paradoxical features, a study on the effects of Europeanisation of interest groups originating from small island member states provides a fascinating and insightful narrative on the dichotomic tension between conservatism and modernity, stability and change, tradition and innovation, seclusion and exposure.

Given that Ireland joined the EU 31 years before Malta, the temporal dimension of the research design covers the period between 2004 and 2012, that is, from the year of Malta's accession to the year when the data collection phase of this study was completed.

Selected case scenarios

In methodological terms, this study subscribes to a comparative case-study oriented approach focused mainly on two broad types of interest groups, namely Social and Human Rights Groups and Environmental Groups. In contrast with trade unions and employers' associations, the selected groups are considered to have less political clout in influencing public affairs. Environmental groups (comprising both permanent promotional movements and single issue pressure groups) and social and human rights organisations (embracing a wide range of interests including community resource

¹⁶ Warrington and Milne (2007), p. 380.

¹⁷ G. Baldacchino (2007), *A World of Islands*, Canada: University of Prince Edward Island, p. 5.

centres, LGBT movements, ethnic minorities, migrant communities, victim support, disabled people, etc.) are tagged as outsiders on the national scale, mainly because many of them are associated with reformists and radical minority leaders who may be ideologically opposed to institutionalised political systems.

Mixed methodology

Since Europeanisation is a complex area for analysis, this study adopts a mixed methods' research design. Whilst quantitative data gives an aggregate overview of the phenomena under scrutiny, the use of qualitative research is necessitated by the persistent requirement to understand complex behaviours, needs, systems and cultures.

The quantitative contribution is provided through the administration of self-completion questionnaires. In the Maltese case, all registered groups under the two selected categories have been included in the exercise, thus no sampling technique was applied.¹⁸ The Irish case required a slightly different strategy. Irish environmental groups that function on a national level have all been included while random sampling was applied for social and human rights groups. The register of *The Wheel*¹⁹ was used to construct the sample. Considering the limited resources available in terms of time, finance and people, 18% of the 800 organisations that are registered within *The Wheel* have been randomly selected, thus, obtaining a sample of 144 entities which more or less resembles the number of social groups in Malta. Table 1 shows the classification of population/sample sizes and response rates in both countries.

Table 1: Sample size and response rate


Sector	Country	Population / Sample Size	Questionnaires received	Response rate
Social and Human rights Groups	Malta	130 ⁺	96	73.8%
	Ireland	144 [*]	64	44.4%
Environmental Groups	Malta	26 ⁺	20	76.9%
	Ireland	47 ⁺	20	42.5%

⁺ Whole population; ^{*} Sample

The second data collection instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews. Besides interviewing high representatives of the two selected types of interest groups, other protagonists were included,

¹⁸ The list of all registered social and Human rights groups and environmental organisations was provided by the Office of the Commissioner of Voluntary Organisations (CVO).

¹⁹ *The Wheel* is a support and representative body connecting community and voluntary organisations and charities across Ireland.



including formal mediating bodies comprising state and non-state actors, politicians, scholars and think tanks, thus permitting a more holistic approach to investigate any signs of Europeanisation within interest groups. A total of 31 interviews were conducted, 15 in Malta and 16 in Ireland. Each organisation/person interviewed was given a code in order to secure anonymity. The coding process works as follows: the first letter corresponds to the country of origin (Malta or Ireland), the next set of letters defines the nature of the organisation (Social/Human rights or Environmental) whilst the number at the end represents the interview number, e.g. MSHG11 refers to a Maltese Social and Human rights Group (interview 11) and IEG21 refers to an Irish Environmental Group (interview 21).

Findings and analysis

This section presents the main findings of the study retrieved through the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. In particular, results shed light on six key dimensions, namely attitudes towards the EU, participation in EU related activities, European funding, opportunities of socialisation, lobbying preferences and normative transformations. The selection of this specific set of dimensions is supported by literature and theories that are employed in the analysis of the EU's effects on domestic civil society. Due to word limit constraints, I will not discuss the theoretical background behind the six dimensions that designate the empirical part of this paper but I will cover this in my forthcoming publication.²⁰

Attitude towards the EU


Public attitudes towards the EU are a highly complex issue, consisting of many individual parts that are closely interlinked with one another. Lauren McLaren claims that 'antipathy toward other cultures' is a crucial element when formulating public perception,²¹ while Thomas Christin maintains that individual attitudes towards domestic economic and political reforms are good predictors of citizens' attitudes towards the EU.²² Most researchers also seem to agree on the importance of 'cognitive mobilization', meaning that a higher level of information about the EU leads to a higher level of public support.²³ Findings from this research confirm that interest groups' attitude towards the EU is affected by a combination of these factors.

²⁰ M.T. Vassallo (forthcoming), *The Europeanization of Interest Groups in Malta and Ireland: a small state perspective*, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹ L.M. McLaren (2002) 'Public Support for the European Union: Cost/Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat?', *The Journal of Politics*, 64(2), 551-566.

²² T. Christin (2005), 'Economic and Political Basis of Attitudes Towards the EU in Central and East European Countries in the 1990s', *European Union Politics*, 6, 29-57.

²³ A. Pözlbauer (2011), 'Public Attitudes Towards the EU – Anti-, Pro- or No-?', at <http://eucenterillinois.blogspot.com/2011/11/public-attitudes-towards-eu-anti-pro-or.html>



The great majority of Maltese Social and Human rights Groups have nurtured a positive attitude towards the EU because they have been supportive of it since the initial stages of the EU referendum campaign in 2003. In this context, one of the interviewees said that *'many NGOs are still adapting to the EU's reality'*. Although an early converter to Malta's accession, NGOs still suffered from an initial shock. Another interviewee maintains that *'groups are now going through a phase of strengthening their capacity, changing mentality and experimenting with a greater number of opportunities and institutions'* (MSHG16).

On the other hand, their Irish counterparts stress the lack of information and proper education on EU matters that led to apathy and negativity among various sectors of the population.

The Irish government used to tell its people that Europe is good for money. It has never told us that being part of the EU is about a sense of citizenship (ISHG9).

In the environmental arena, Maltese and Irish groups express a high degree of confidence in being part of the EU because it is *'deemed as a leader of environmental legislation'* (MEG18+IEG15). The following excerpts reveal a pro-EU sentiment among islanders.

Green NGOs in Malta cannot be indifferent to the EU. It is only through this way that the Maltese authorities are being forced to adopt more environment friendly measures (MEG18).

The degree of Europeanisation on Irish civil society has been strong, mainly for two reasons, namely EU funding and EU environmental law (IEG19).

Following this initial analysis, a series of statistical findings that try to decode attitudes towards the EU from different standpoints follows. Such quantitative results are corroborating evidence that confirms the general orientation established qualitatively as discussed above.

Vision, training, ownership and European participation

Interest groups were asked whether the European dimension has filtered within their organisational vision/mission statement. Table 2 indicates that almost 54% of Maltese Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups (SHEGs) are significantly more proactive in incorporating a European dimension in their vision/mission statements when compared to 38% of their Irish counterparts. Among other contending elements, the time factor has to be considered in this case. Forty years of membership might have rendered the Irish less enthusiastic about the European integration project and, consequently more disinclined to own a European vision.

Table 2: European dimension included in the vision/mission statement

The vision/mission statement incorporates a European dimension		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	62	32	94
	Percentage	53.9%	38.1%	47.2%
No	Count	53	52	105
	Percentage	46.1%	61.9%	52.8%
Total	Count	115	84	199
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 4.87, v = 1, p = 0.027$$

The lack of training and knowledge claimed by Irish interviewees is confirmed in Table 3 which reveals a notable difference between Maltese and Irish SHEGs in terms of training opportunities. 46.1% of Maltese groups, as against 22.9% of Irish groups, have participated in training programmes to deepen and widen their knowledge on EU matters.

Table 3: Training in EU affairs

Participation in training programmes to acquire necessary skills in EU affairs		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	53	19	72
	Percentage	46.1%	22.9%	36.4%
No	Count	62	64	126
	Percentage	53.9%	77.1%	63.6%
Total	Count	115	83	198
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 11.208, v = 1, p = 0.001$$

The way EU matters are owned and managed at interest groups' level is another indicator of groups' attitude towards the EU. To this effect, respondents were asked whether their organisation appoints a person/s to take care of EU related issues. Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between the two states. Approximately half of the groups do not appoint any member/s to deal with EU affairs (46.1% in Malta and 54.2% in Ireland). The most widely used practice in Malta (27%) is that of appointing one person who, besides other matters, is also responsible for the coordination of EU affairs. In Ireland's case, the most preferred method is to delegate European matters to more than one committee officer (26.5%).

Table 4: Responsibility of EU affairs within organisations

Responsibility of EU affairs within organisations		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes, one person who is solely responsible	Count	7	5	12
	Percentage	6.1%	6.0%	6.1%
Yes, one who performs other tasks as well	Count	31	11	42
	Percentage	27.0%	13.3%	21.2%
More than one person responsible	Count	24	22	46
	Percentage	20.9%	26.5%	23.2%
No	Count	53	45	98
	Percentage	46.1%	54.2%	49.5%
Total	Count	115	83	198
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 5.571, v = 3, p = 0.134$$

Statistics resulting from Table 5 gauge the trend of domestic groups' participation in EU related activities over a span of almost ten years (2004-2012) wherein yet again Maltese and Irish results are comparable. Though the difference between the two member states is not statistically significant, it is still worth noting these types of results as they are themselves a testimony of the high comparability levels between Malta and Ireland. The largest segment of groups (36.8% in Malta and 37.4% in Ireland) registered an accelerated trend of participation, while an approximate 28.6% have reached a plateau (27.2% and 30% respectively). Although those registering a decreasing rate account for less than 10% (3.5% in Malta and 8.8% in Ireland), concern arises for those who fall under the category of *not applicable* (32.5% in Malta and 23.8% in Ireland) because they seem to be totally indifferent to the European reality.

Table 5: Rate of participation in EU related activities

The rate of participation in EU related activities		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Increased	Count	42	30	72
	Percentage	36.8%	37.5%	37.1%
Remained Stable	Count	31	24	55
	Percentage	27.2%	30.0%	28.4%
Decreased	Count	4	7	11
	Percentage	3.5%	8.8%	5.7%
Not Applicable	Count	37	19	56
	Percentage	32.5%	23.8%	28.9%
Total	Count	114	80	194
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 3.648, v = 3, p = 0.302$$



Links and Lobbying in the EU

Qualitative findings in this section reinforce the belief that the Brussels route of influence does not replace the domestic route. European institutions rigorously demand that interest groups must first address their concerns to institutions at member state level. Once all domestic efforts have been exhausted, and a decision is taken to present the case to the European Commission, then interest groups must roll out an evidence-based case. Ideological or emotional appeals simply do not work at European level. If ‘*you have done your research well*’ (MSHG10) and ‘*with a bit of luck*’ (IEG17), the Commission can eventually opt to bring your case forward.

Maltese SHEGs are well aware of how things should proceed to lobby at EU level if the need arises. Their comments show that they have learned fast the rules of the game.

Prior to venturing your concerns in Europe, an organisation must first exhaust all the [domestic] possibilities. Yet, there have been cases where we had to go to the Commission. Then there are issues involving the European Parliament where we were also active (MSHG11).

When we become aware that local authorities are not interested in getting things done, we start making pressure in Brussels. In addition, we always participate in meetings whenever the Environment Commissioner visits Malta (MEG18).

Although the Maltese and Irish governments have instituted domestic structures responsible for civil dialogue, coordination of national policy and discussion of EU legislative measures, NGOs are nonetheless unrestrained to cross the sea on their way to lobby for their interest in Brussels.

The discussion will now incorporate statistical findings that shed light on the potentials and limitations of Maltese and Irish interest groups to maintain hierarchical links with Brussels.

EU contacts and lobbying

When asked about the nature of contact they have already established in Brussels (see Table 6), findings show a varied selection of contact types, yet statistically they are highly comparable. A substantial portion of interest groups utilise multiple channels of communication. Relying on umbrella Euro-groups proves to be the most widely used form of attachment both in Malta (21.2%) and Ireland (31.2%), followed by online networking in Malta (19.2%) and, in Ireland, by members travelling overseas (17.6%). The ones who scored *other means* (11.5% in Malta and 12.8% in Ireland) are referring to three major types of contacts: (a) delegating this task to their parent organisation that in turn has contacts in Brussels, (b) contacts with MEPs and (c) meetings with European Commissioners when they visit the island. However there is still a substantial number of SHEGs

(32.7% in Malta and 23.2% in Ireland) that have not yet established any contact of any sort in Brussels.

Table 6: Types of contact established in Brussels

The type of contact that has already been established in Brussels, if any		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Permanent Office in Brussels	Count	3	2	5
	Percentage	1.9%	1.6%	1.8%
Relying on umbrella Euro-groups based in Brussels	Count	33	39	72
	Percentage	21.2%	31.2%	25.6%
Sending members to Brussels periodically	Count	21	22	43
	Percentage	13.5%	17.6%	15.3%
Online networking	Count	30	17	47
	Percentage	19.2%	13.6%	16.7%
Other means	Count	18	16	34
	Percentage	11.5%	12.8%	12.1%
No contact	Count	51	29	80
	Percentage	32.7%	23.2%	28.5%
Total	Count	156	125	281
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 7.154, v = 5, p = 0.209$$

The next finding in Table 7 shows whether interest groups are being engaged to promote and defend their interests at EU level. The majority of Maltese and Irish SHEGs are still not involved (64.3% and 57.8% respectively), indicating no significant difference between the two polities. Once more, the findings clearly show that in many aspects concerning the character and role of domestic interest groups in an EU environment, Malta and Ireland are highly comparable.

Table 7: Lobbying at EU level

Engagement in lobbying with any institution of the EU		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	41	35	76
	Percentage	35.7%	42.2%	38.4%
No	Count	74	48	122
	Percentage	64.3%	57.8%	61.6%
Total	Count	115	83	198
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.866, v = 1, p = 0.352$$

The reasons behind the lack of participation at EU level are inquired in Table 8. Although χ^2 analysis in Table 8 confirms that there is no significant difference between Malta and Ireland, the results are nonetheless interesting. While lack of administrative capacity is the most prominent reason that is debarring Maltese and Irish SHEGs from experimenting with the Brussels route of influence (36.3% and 27.0% respectively), the second most scored reason is that the domestic route

of influence is still being preferred (19.5% and 24.0% respectively). The implied cost of lobbying at EU level is also deemed to be a significant justification for staying out of the game (10.6% in Malta and 17.0% in Ireland). MSHG10 shows no hesitation in declaring that *'the biggest hurdles in participating more extensively in the European experience are essentially a lack of people and money'*.

Table 8: Reasons for not lobbying at EU level

Reasons why certain organisations do not engage with EU institutions for lobbying purposes		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Domestic route of influence preferred	Count	22	24	46
	Percentage	19.5%	24.0%	21.6%
Targeting national ministers who in turn voice their opinion at the Council of Ministers	Count	13	10	23
	Percentage	11.5%	10.0%	10.8%
High cost of lobbying at EU level	Count	12	17	29
	Percentage	10.6%	17.0%	13.6%
No knowledge of EU institutional design	Count	9	8	17
	Percentage	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%
EU does not have relevance	Count	11	9	20
	Percentage	9.7%	9.0%	9.4%
Lack of administrative capacity	Count	41	27	68
	Percentage	36.3%	27.0%	31.9%
Other reasons	Count	5	5	10
	Percentage	4.4%	5.0%	4.7%
Total	Count	113	100	213
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 3.702, v = 6, p = 0.717$$

The last statistical finding in this section (Table 9) shows that there is a significant difference among the preferences of Maltese and Irish SHEGs as to whom they lobby at the supranational level. As expected the European Commission and members of the European Parliament enjoy the top ranks in both countries (approximately 30%). This is understandable in the context of small states where people feel more attached to their politicians, including those functioning at the supranational level. Access to the European Economic and Social Committee is imbalanced; almost 16% of Irish SHEGs do relate to this consultative institution compared to barely 5% of their Maltese counterparts. The last point of significant difference concerns the reliance on *other means* which in the case of Malta is substantial (20.3%), contrasted to barely 5% on the Irish part. In the majority of cases, respondents were either referring to their national parent organisation or to European federations that, in turn, voice their concerns at the EU level.

Table 9: Lobbying institutions in Brussels

European institutions targeted for lobbying purposes		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
European Commission	Count	19	24	43
	Percentage	32.2%	29.3%	30.5%
National members of European Economic and Social Committee	Count	3	13	16
	Percentage	5.1%	15.9%	11.3%
National MEPs	Count	21	25	46
	Percentage	35.6%	30.5%	32.6%
Commissioner of home country	Count	4	7	11
	Percentage	6.8%	8.5%	7.8%
Member State holding Presidency of Council	Count	0	9	9
	Percentage	.0%	11.0%	6.4%
Other means	Count	12	4	16
	Percentage	20.3%	4.9%	11.3%
Total	Count	59	82	141
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 17.717, v = 5, p = 0.003$$


EU funding and socialisation

The acquisition of EU funding is always a crucial element not only to governments but also to civil society groups that have been found to suffer chronically from poor resources and administrative capacity.²⁴ On the other hand, accession to the EU led to a proliferation of networking opportunities with other European partners, thus, taking advantage of greater socialisation, collective learning and sharing of best practices. Qualitative findings show which of the two is most prized and how priorities shifted over time. Afterwards, the discussion will incorporate statistical data to determine the take up of funding and networking opportunities over the period between 2004 and 2012.

Maltese SHEGs seem not to differentiate between the two stimuli as they are both deemed ‘*necessary prerequisites to live the European vocation*’. According to one of the interviewees, a Maltese political observer, the two major problems that groups face in Malta are ‘*smallness*’, leading to a limited resource base; and ‘*islandness*’ that can lock in stakeholders in geographical and mental isolation. To address these innate coercive restraints, the Maltese government felt that it is its obligation to set up a specialised mediating body, the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC), to help interest groups apply for funds and identify European partners. Thus, funding and socialisation are not mutually exclusive but two indispensable elements.

Feedback by other Maltese interviewees is very similar and no difference results between the two cohorts of selected interest groups.

²⁴ R. Pace (rap.) (2008), *Europe Listens 2 – A Consultation with Maltese Civil Society*, 9-12 December 2008, Malta: Representation of the European Commission in Malta and MEUSAC.



If it weren't for the EU funds, our group couldn't have been able to flourish and increase its European and international connections. The sustainability of our organisation is based on government and EU funding (MSHG13).

The EU gave us new opportunities to embark on good practice sharing with other groups in the EU. We started creating partnerships and exchange ideas beyond our shores. However, we cannot seize opportunities unless we have the funds. (MEG19).

The Irish narrative presents a completely different line-up. Having nurtured a framework that is heavily reliant on the Anglo-Saxon world, Irish SHEGs never really developed a need to Europeanise their circles of networks and contacts. So the element of socialisation was non-existent for many Irish groups but, in these last years, things started moving in a different direction.

We have only introduced the international dimension in these last two years. We are guilty as everybody else. It has to do a bit with our national character. It has a little bit to do with how the government has always treated the EU (ISHG9).

For a country that was focused on Britain and America only, it shifted to become focused on Europe as well. But this is a very recent development (ISHG13).

Irish green groups share the same narrative. Since Ireland's accession in 1973, funding always enjoyed a central and almost monolithic supremacy over all other considerations.

Quite definitely, for a long time funding was first priority. No socialisation at all (IEG15).

The process of Europeanisation has been motivated by the opportunity of obtaining funds for many years (IEG21).

The next step is to present a number of quantitative findings that deal either with EU funding or with the socialisation effect.

EU funds, federations and partners

The selected series of statistical findings led to no significant differences between Malta and Ireland (that is, p value is above the 0.05 criterion), thus confirming a high degree of comparability.

Table 10 shows that Maltese interest groups are slightly more adventurous than the Irish in trying their best to access EU funding (60% and 51.8% respectively). Likewise, the rate of success is also comparable. Table 11 reveals that Maltese and Irish SHEGs have almost the same success rate (approximately 77%), with the two cohorts of financing between 1 and 5 projects being the most

subscribed to (60% [22.9% + 37.1%] in Malta and 66% [20.5% + 45.5%] in Ireland). The percentage of unsuccessful applicants is also highly comparable, that is, 22.9% in Malta and 20.5% in Ireland.

Table 10: Attempts to access EU funds

Attempts to access EU funds		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	69	43	112
	Percentage	60.0%	51.8%	56.6%
No	Count	46	40	86
	Percentage	40.0%	48.2%	43.4%
Total	Count	115	83	198
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 1.317, v = 1, p = 0.251$$

Table 11: Success in obtaining EU funds

Success achieved in obtaining EU funds		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes in 1 project	Count	16	9	25
	Percentage	22.9%	20.5%	21.9%
Yes in more than 1 less than 5 projects	Count	26	20	46
	Percentage	37.1%	45.5%	40.4%
Yes in 5 projects or more	Count	12	6	18
	Percentage	17.1%	13.6%	15.8%
No	Count	16	9	25
	Percentage	22.9%	20.5%	21.9%
Total	Count	70	44	114
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.815, v = 3, p = 0.846$$

The next set of data figures deal exclusively with the socialisation effect, in particular the participation of domestic groups in European federations and their drive to establish partners to work on joint projects and engage in mutual learning processes. A European federation is an umbrella organisation made up of member associations that are functional on a member state level. Such federations provide a forum for European cooperation in a wide range of fields, including training, research and lobbying. Table 12 shows that almost half of SHEGs in Malta and Ireland are affiliated to European federations (43.0% and 47.0% respectively). However the number of non-affiliated organisations, most of which are only functional at local or parish level, is still significant. When the latter were asked why they do not feel the need to appertain to European federations, the most scored reason in the two countries is that 'such need does not exist' because they are entirely

committed to domestic issues. Secondly, a third of SHEGs in Malta and Ireland declare that the cost of affiliation is too expensive.

Table 12: Affiliation to European federations

Affiliation to any European federation		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	49	39	88
	Percentage	43.0%	47.0%	44.7%
No	Count	65	44	109
	Percentage	57.0%	53.0%	55.3%
Total	Count	114	83	197
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.312, v = 1, p = 0.577$$

Table 13 reveals another element of high comparability between the two states in the identification of European partner organisations to cooperate over joint projects. Half of SHEGs in Malta and Ireland have established partner organisations across the EU (49.6% and 54.8% respectively).

Table 13: Cooperation with European partners

Identification of European partner organisations to cooperate over joint projects		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	58	46	103
	Percentage	50.4%	54.8%	51.8%
No	Count	57	38	96
	Percentage	49.6%	45.2%	48.2%
Total	Count	115	84	199
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.525, v = 1, p = 0.469$$

EU norms and values

Changes in norms are a critical factor to determine whether European influences have infiltrated the mindset of interest groups' members. Maltese interviewees are very optimistic that more changes in attitude, culture and perception are on the way as a result of our EU membership because they believe that the ball has already started rolling at a faster pace than expected.

Those who are involved in minority rights are very much involved in European affairs. For us, the EU is a source to speed up change in [domestic] legislation through a fast track change in public mentality (MSHG10).

Our NGOs must be on the forefront to bring pilot studies to Malta and, when enough experience has been gained, they could be extended to other larger member states. I am thinking of mentoring, partnerships, and internal reengineering projects (MSHG15).

Other Maltese protagonists emphasise that the need for change is already being realised, not only at structural and tactical levels, but most importantly, in terms of leadership transformation.

We've embarked on internal strategic changes to develop and diversify as an entity since Malta's EU accession. This involved a change in vision through a different leadership mentality (MSHG13).

We have brought a number of European group leaders to address our members who challenged our frame of mind and taught us how to look beyond ourselves. It is all about being open to new ideas (MSHG14).

At times optimism makes way for a more sarcastic tone. When interviewing Irish leaders, Piaras Mac Éinrí, a respected Irish academic, diplomat and civil society activist, is unequivocal: *'I would be critical of the failure of the Irish NGO sector to fully understand the possibilities of a more proactive approach to EU but, then again, most of these NGOs just don't have the knowledge, experience or resources to do this'*.²⁵

Normative change stimuli

Table 14 measures the extent of EU influence on the organisations' members' mindset. The mean rating scores in both countries are almost congruent (2.65 in Malta and 2.69 in Ireland), signifying that respondents are closer to *considerable* limits of influence on a four point likert scale. Since the p value exceeds the 0.05 criterion, no statistical difference emerges between Malta and Ireland.

Table 14: The extent of EU influence on the mindset of members within the organisation

Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Mann-Whitney U test	p value
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Malta	2.65	1.047	2.45	2.84	4485.500	0.840
Ireland	2.69	1.001	2.46	2.91		

Similarly, Table 15 reveals the extent of influence by European federations' norms and practices on the character of domestic interest groups. The mean rating score is the same for both countries (2.165 mean), implying a minor extent of influence on a four point likert scale. Since findings are highly comparable, no significant difference is affirmed.

²⁵ P.M. Éinrí (2012), Correspondence with the author.

Table 15: The extent of influence on the organisation by norms and practices of European federations

Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Mann-Whitney U test	p value
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Malta	2.16	1.172	1.94	2.38	4469.000	0.804
Ireland	2.17	0.991	1.95	2.40		

Table 16 conveys a significant difference in the receptivity of Maltese and Irish SHEGs towards new ideas stemming from their European partners. While 42.5% of the Maltese believe that there have been changes within their organisations that are attributed to their European partners, 47.8% deny any causal relationship between internal changes and external influences. Contrastingly, the Irish show a greater sense of inconclusiveness: 39.8% confirm the causal relationship, 31.3% deny it and a substantial segment, 28.9%, did not give a definite answer and preferred the 'don't know' category.

Table 16: Internal changes attributed to new ideas brought about by European partners

There have been changes within the organisation that are attributed to new ideas brought about by European partners		Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Total
		Malta	Ireland	
Yes	Count	48	33	81
	Percentage	42.5%	39.8%	41.3%
No	Count	54	26	80
	Percentage	47.8%	31.3%	40.8%
Don't Know	Count	11	24	35
	Percentage	9.7%	28.9%	17.9%
Total	Count	113	83	196
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$$X^2 = 13.122, v = 2, p = 0.001$$

While the three previous results showed the extent of European influence through vertical and lateral axis, the next one maps out the proper stimuli that trigger changes within domestic interest groups. Table 17 shows the ranking of five major stimuli emanating from the EU's pattern and style of governance. In the case of Maltese SHEGS it is clear that they are primarily motivated by *European funds* (3.84 mean), followed by *socialisation with European partners* (3.10 mean). In the case of Irish SHEGs, the major stimulus of change is almost spread equally among three sources, namely *socialisation with European partners* (3.32 mean), *European funds* (3.31 mean) and the *value of consensus* (3.12 mean). The fact that the *p* value in the case of European funding is just on the point of 0.05 criterion of significance indicates that, in this case only, the result goes beyond the parameters of the sample.

Table 17: Sources of stimulus that instigate change in the organisation's tactics and strategies

Social, Human rights and Environmental Groups		Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Mann-Whitney U Test	p value
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
European Funds	Malta	3.8396	1.26253	3.4916	4.1876	617.0000	0.050
	Ireland	3.3065	1.20884	2.8630	3.7499		
Consensus Value	Malta	2.6132	1.17523	2.2893	2.9371	661.0000	0.131
	Ireland	3.1129	1.37058	2.6102	3.6156		
Socialisation With Partners	Malta	3.1038	1.14924	2.7870	3.4205	739.0000	0.437
	Ireland	3.3226	1.30095	2.8454	3.7998		
Positive Attitude	Malta	2.4528	1.02029	2.1716	2.7341	689.0000	0.210
	Ireland	2.7097	.99812	2.3436	3.0758		
Training opportunities	Malta	2.9906	1.15813	2.6713	3.3098	632.5000	0.075
	Ireland	2.5484	.89773	2.2191	2.8777		

Hypothesis testing

The concluding part brings together all the results that emerged from both quantitative and qualitative data streams, addressing the two original aims and identifying areas for further research. The first research aim, that is, to assess whether Maltese and Irish interest groups have experienced a significant degree of Europeanisation or not, is to be achieved by a statistical test. The second research aim which tries to single out which enablers of change are most prevalent in the two countries, in other words whether horizontal or vertical dimensions of Europeanisation are involved, is to be addressed by a qualitative thematic analysis.

Table 18 computes the earlier statistical data to present an overall picture of the changes that occurred in interest groups in Malta and Ireland as a consequence of a number of variables related to Europeanisation. For a variable to be considered as a contributor of a significant change, it must satisfy the criteria of exceeding the limit of 50% in its score. Likewise, if it does not exceed 50%, it is not deemed to have caused a significant change. In the case of answers involving a four point likert scale, significant change signifies that the score has exceeded the mid-point position, that is, 2.5. If this is not surpassed, no significant change has occurred.

Table 18: Deciphering which Europeanisation variables caused significant change

		No significant change		Significant change	
		Malta	Ireland	Malta	Ireland
1	European dimension included in vision/mission statement		1	1	
2	Training in EU affairs	1	1		
3	Responsibility of EU affairs within organisations		1	1	
4	Participation in EU related activities			1	1
5	Established contacts in Brussels			1	1
6	Lobbying at the EU level	1	1		
7	Attempts to access EU funding			1	1
8	Success in obtaining EU funding			1	1
9	Affiliation to European federations	1	1		
10	Cooperation with European partners			1	1
11	EU influence on the mindset of members within organisations			1	1
12	Influence of European federations on organisation's norms and practices	1	1		
13	Internal changes attributed to European partners	1	1		
14	EU funds as change stimulus			1	1
15	Consensus value as change stimulus			1	1
16	Socialisation as change stimulus			1	1
17	Positive attitude as change stimulus	1			1
18	Training as change stimulus			1	1
TOTALS:		6	7	12	11

The next step is to convert these ratios into statistical outcomes so as to carry out the testing of the null hypothesis. Since in this case we are comparing two proportions and not means, then the z-score is being used to test hypothesis because the sampling distribution of the difference of two proportions is assumed to be normally distributed. Suppose that Irish groups were assessed on n_1 aspects of significant change and n_2 aspects of marginal change. Let X_1 be the number of aspects in which Irish groups exhibited a significant change and let X_2 be the number of aspects in which they exhibited a marginal change. The sample proportions \bar{p}_1 and \bar{p}_2 are:

$$\bar{p}_1 = X_1/n_1 \text{ and } \bar{p}_2 = X_2/n_2$$

The central limit theorem states that the random variable z (z-score) has an approximate standard Normal distribution where:

$$z = (\bar{p}_1 - \bar{p}_2) - (p_1 - p_2) / \sqrt{[\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})(1/n_1 + 1/n_2)]}$$

$$\text{and } \hat{p} = \frac{X_1 + X_2}{n_1 + n_2}$$

If we assume that Irish groups can be assessed on a very larger number of aspects, then the actual proportions (p_1 and p_2), of aspects in which they exhibited significant or marginal change are unknown. In order to test whether the actual proportion p_1 (actual proportion of aspects in which Irish actors exhibited a significant change) differs significantly from the actual proportion p_2 (actual proportion of aspects in which Irish actors exhibited a marginal change), we specify the following hypotheses:

$$H_0 : p_1 - p_2 = 0$$

$$H_1 : p_1 - p_2 \neq 0$$

The null hypothesis (actual proportions do not differ significantly) is accepted if the estimated value of z lies between ± 1.96 . On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis (proportions differ significantly) is accepted if the estimated value of z lies beyond ± 1.96 .

Now we can introduce the actual statistical figures to test hypothesis. In 12 out of a total of 18 aspects Maltese interest groups displayed a significant change, whereas in 6 out of a total of 18 aspects they displayed a marginal change. Thus the sample proportion of aspects in which a significant change (\bar{p}_1) was exhibited is 66.67% ($12/18 \times 100\%$) and the sample proportion of aspects in which a marginal change (\bar{p}_2) was exhibited is 33.33% ($6/18 \times 100\%$).


So if $n_1 = 18$, $X_1 = 12$, $n_2 = 18$ and $X_2 = 6$, then

$$\bar{p}_1 = X_1 / n_1 = 12/18 = 0.6667 \quad \text{and} \quad \bar{p}_2 = X_2 / n_2 = 6/18 = 0.3333$$

$$\hat{p} = (X_1 + X_2) / (n_1 + n_2) = (12 + 6) / (18 + 18) = 0.5$$

$$\text{Standard error} = \sqrt{[\hat{p}(1-\hat{p})(1/n_1 + 1/n_2)]} = \sqrt{[(0.5)(0.5)(1/18 + 1/18)]} = 0.1666$$

$$z = (\bar{p}_1 - \bar{p}_2) / \text{standard error} = 0.6667 - 0.3333 / 0.1666 = 2.0004$$



Since $z = 2.0004$ exceeds 1.96 we accept the alternative hypothesis indicating that the proportions of aspects in which Maltese groups exhibited a significant change is significantly larger than the proportion of aspects in which they exhibited a marginal change. In other words Maltese interest groups have experienced significant Europeanisation.


If we apply the same method, the z-score of Irish interest groups is 1.3288. Since it does not exceed 1.96 we accept the null hypothesis indicating that the proportions of aspects in which Irish groups exhibited a significant change is NOT significantly larger than the proportion of aspects in which they exhibited a marginal change. Thus interest groups in Ireland have experienced marginal Europeanisation.

Conclusion: the degree and nature of Europeanisation

So far we have established the degree of Europeanisation among Maltese and Irish groups. Our second endeavour is to establish which enablers of change are at play in the two polities. In particular we have to differentiate between, on the one hand, Europeanisation as a result of vertical stimuli based on lobbying and the maximisation of efficient results and, on the other hand, Europeanisation based on horizontal stimuli that emphasises socialisation and coordination. The answer is provided through an inductive process of data analysis.

Maltese interest groups are more resolute to live up to their 'European vocation' to the full, despite inbuilt coercive constraints that impose limits to European exposure. Many of their leaders, particularly those of peak interest groups and mediating bodies, talk about 'the need for Europe' to reaffirm themselves, their organisation and for all they believe in. Experience on the ground is indicating that the insular culture and behavioural attitudes of interest groups are likewise being gradually transformed through a process of normativeness and interaction among a wider network of European political communities. Thus it comes as no surprise that the Maltese have adopted a more positive and supportive attitude towards the EU. However engagement with the EU institutional architecture is still low because financial and human backup are lacking back home. Notwithstanding restraints, Maltese interest groups are learning fast the rules of the game because of their enhanced socialisation at the European level and in other member states. Both vertical and lateral triggers of Europeanisation are transforming the character of Maltese civil society, but data give ample evidence that the predominant stimuli are the horizontal enablers of change, implying that the true cause of change is of a sociological origin.

Contrastingly, interest groups in Ireland are ambivalent to the European reality. Although they admit that their attitude, knowledge and experience towards European affairs are somehow limited, they



are still vociferous to get from Brussels all that was denied by their government in the social and environmental policy domains. Accession to the EU has provided them with an increased number of opportunities, in particular legislative measures and funding resources, to exercise their influence in more pragmatic ways, always in search for optimum results to maximise the attainment of their respective interests. However, the recent economic crisis continued to dampen the outlook of the Irish towards the EU. Due to their innate attachment to the Anglo-Saxon culture, Irish groups have not invested enough effort to identify and collaborate with peer organisations from across other member states. When taking stock of all the factors at play, it transpires that the type of Europeanisation characterising Irish interest groups finds its roots in its vertical dimension which refers to hierarchical linkages and negotiations between European and national levels of governance.

In conclusion, this study confirms that interest groups in Malta and Ireland are undergoing a process of gradual Europeanisation that may eventually lead to a reconfiguration of domestic powers. This assertion by no means implies that European influences have wiped out the ingrained geopolitical characteristics embedded in the two polities. In fact, it is by understanding these embedded features that one can determine the extent and true nature of Europeanisation at the domestic level over time.

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